



**Commonwealth of Massachusetts Executive Department
Office of Governor Deval L. Patrick
Press Release**

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GOVERNOR PATRICK SIGNS “AN ACT TO PROMOTE PUBLIC SAFETY AND PROTECT ACCESS TO REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH CARE”

BOSTON – Wednesday, July 30, 2014 - Governor Deval Patrick today signed S. 2283, “An Act to Promote Public Safety and Protect Access to Reproductive Health Care Facilities.” The legislation addresses the United States Supreme Court’s recent decision striking down the “buffer zone” law in Massachusetts that called for a protest-free 35-foot area around the entrances of women’s health care facilities.

“I am incredibly proud to sign legislation that continues Massachusetts leadership in ensuring that women seeking to access reproductive health facilities can do so safely and without harassment, and that the employees of those facilities can arrive at work each day without fear of harm,” said Governor Patrick.

In response to the Court’s decision, Governor Patrick joined a coalition of women’s healthcare advocates and leaders, including Attorney General Martha Coakley, Senate President Therese Murray, Speaker Robert DeLeo, President and CEO of Planned Parenthood League of Massachusetts Marty Walz, NARAL Pro-Choice Massachusetts Executive Director Megan Amundson and Massachusetts legislators, to produce a bill that strikes a balance between an individual’s right to free speech and the rights of those seeking access to reproductive health facilities.

“This bill takes an important step toward protecting the rights of women and public safety around reproductive health facilities,” said Attorney General Coakley. “We now have new tools to help ensure access to these facilities free from intimidation and threats. I am very thankful to the Governor for his leadership on this issue, and to the Legislature for their swift action.”

“I am proud of the Legislature for taking action to restore privacy and respect for women seeking access to health care,” said Senate President Murray. “This bill takes a responsible approach to address the concerns of the Court and, most importantly, protect the rights that all women are entitled to when making decisions about their personal health.”

“This legislation will enhance public safety and help ensure equitable access to care,” said Speaker DeLeo. “I believe that by focusing on conduct we will protect individuals using these health care facilities. I thank Governor Patrick, my colleagues in the

Legislature, Senate President Murray and Attorney General Coakley for their vigilance in this regard.”

“The Safe Access law is essential for protecting safe and unimpeded access to our health centers,” said Walz. “It will have an immediate impact on our patients and staff, allowing us, in conjunction with local law enforcement and the Attorney General, to better ensure our patients’ ability to see their doctor without worrying about their safety and well-being. I am grateful for Governor Patrick’s unwavering support for reproductive health care access today and throughout his time in office. The Safe Access bill is one of the last major bills he will sign into law as Governor, underscoring how important this law will be to the people of Massachusetts.”

The legislation signed on Wednesday allows law enforcement to disperse individuals who are significantly impeding access to a facility. After an order is issued, those subject to it may not approach within 25 feet of a clinic entrance for a period of 8 hours. Failure to abide by a dispersal order is a misdemeanor. The legislation also bars the knowing or reckless impediment of a vehicle that is attempting to access or leave the parking lot of a reproductive health facility. Under the bill, such behavior is also a misdemeanor.

In addition, the bill adopts a state version of the federal Freedom of Access to Clinic Entrances (FACE) Act, which prohibits the use of force, physical act or threat of force directed at an individual attempting to access or depart from a reproductive health facility. Under the bill, whether the behavior is classified as a misdemeanor or a felony will be up to the District Attorney’s Office in the first instance and, ultimately, the criminal court.

Finally, the bill expands the Massachusetts Civil Rights Act to permit the Attorney General to seek an award of compensatory damages for any aggrieved person or entity. The expansion of the Attorney General’s powers to permit the seeking of compensatory relief represents a significant and progressive expansion of state civil rights law.

The bill was originally sponsored by Senator Harriette Chandler.

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